

Repetition Compulsion by Captain Top Hat

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Summary: Steve's life has been reduced to a series of increasingly low points. When he finally reaches his lowest, there's only one place for him to go: the passenger seat of a '79 Camaro. Rated M for language, a healthy amount of smut and some potentially triggering content in later chapters.

1. Chapter 1

He'd been driving for almost an hour. Nowhere to go. No one to see. Still plenty of time to waste before he picked Dustin up after the dance. He expected that the kid might need some comforting on the way home. The little shit had confidence but kids his age could be mean. As he'd dropped him off, Steve had quietly known that he was potentially setting Dustin up for failure. He'd delivered the pep talk and insisted that it'd go great, all the while knowing that it would likely be one of the hardest experiences of the young boy's life. He didn't wish it on the kid, not at all. But kids his age were mean. Steve had been mean.

Despite his pessimism, however, part of Steve eagerly anticipated the moment that Dustin would get back into the car, if only for the slim possibility that the boy would be beaming with pride, ready to relay to him every wonderful detail of the night. Minute as the chance may have been, Steve needed that hope. He needed to think that there was a chance for a kid like Dustin to win. Later, he would pick the little dipshit up, fully prepared with a reassuring lie that things got easier as you got older. He just hoped he wouldn't have to use it. Until then, with nothing better to do, Steve would drive.

Nowhere to go. No one to see. Everyone in his social circle was at a middle school dance. The sad fact spoke volumes not only about his current position on the Hawkins social ladder but also how many rungs he'd fallen in the past year. No parties to attend, no gang of pseudo-friends to hang out with. He drove.

Eventually he found himself outside of a diner, hungry but apprehensive in entering. From the safety of his parked car his eyes scanned the booths through the window. Hawkins was a damn small town but there were some people that he made a conscious effort to avoid, especially if he was about to go buy a single helping of fast food to eat alone in his car. Some inconveniences were worth the effort.

Declaring the coast clear, he headed inside and ordered something with a lot of cheese on it. Each time the diner door opened, he tensed slightly, waiting to hear a gaggle of his peers enter and start ragging

on him. They'd mock him for being alone on a Saturday night, no date, no friends. They'd laugh at him for waiting around for a thirteen year old to finish up at the God damn "Snow Ball", just to have someone to hang out with. They'd sneer at him and treat him like shit. It never happened. But every time the door opened, he waited for it.

He could've sat in the diner to eat his food. It would've been warm and bright. Yet he chose the car and the chill that came with it. He just listened to the radio and ate fries, wondering how much more pathetic he could get.

The sudden oncoming roar of a Camaro made him jump in his seat. He glanced in his rear view, already knowing what he was going to see. That God damn car.

It pulled up at the far end of the diner's parking lot. The engine was barely off when the driver's side door popped open and Billy stepped out, every inch of him dripping with bravado. Steve wondered for a moment if the boy ever stepped out of a car like a normal human being. He continued to watch through his rear view mirror as a second car pulled up next to the first, this one carrying four or five of his fellow seniors. Steve recognized them all. He recognized them as people he would have called his friends at one stage. He slid down in his seat and hoped they would go inside soon.

Though unlikely to garner much attention, Steve's paranoia forced him to switch off the radio. Sitting slumped in the silence, half a cheeseburger going cold on his lap, he decided that this was how much more pathetic he could get. He kept an eye on the side mirror and waited for the horde to go inside. He watched Billy shove his tongue down some girl's throat. He felt sorry for her.

They never looked in his direction. No one seemed to notice his car. After ten minutes he started feeling ridiculous and turned the radio back on, although he kept the volume down low.

After another ten minutes he began to just get angry. He sipped at his soda, now mostly melted ice, and listened to a never-ending trail of Christmas music. Though perhaps premature, the idea that he might die in the car was not beyond his fathom.

Finally sick of hearing "Baby, It's Cold Outside", Steve switched the radio off again and looked at his watch, ensuring that he still had time to collect Dustin. Just about. He let out a sigh of relief when he looked back to the mirror and saw the gang heading inside, the diner door just closing behind them. Ignoring the pain in his now stiff back, Steve sat up straight and turned the key.

There was no reaction from the car.

"No." He said simply, turning the key again.

Again, there was nothing.

"No. No. No, no, no, no, no!" He punched the dashboard and then cursed himself for the pain in his fist.

"Car trouble?"

The night continued it's track of increasingly pathetic moments.

Had his window been rolled down, Steve would've likely smelled Billy's ridiculous cologne before he'd had a chance to sneak up on him. Unfortunately this hadn't been the case and Steve now found himself trying very hard not to look out his window at who he knew stood there.

"Nope."

"I beg to differ. You've been sitting there for nearly thirty minutes, probably left the radio on, maybe even the heat too. Knowing you." There was a pause that Steve didn't enjoy. "Never would've occurred to you that that kind of thing might run a battery down."

Steve kept his eyes ahead of him and tried not to show any emotions.

"I'm fine."

"Yeah, sure you are." Another one of those pauses, always carefully placed. "Why don't you pop the hood?"

Surprised, Steve inadvertently looked to his window. He regretted it the minute he saw that damn smirk. Billy had his arm spread over the

top of window and was staring in at him. Smug satisfaction incarnate.

"I don't need any help – "

"All I need is some jumper cables and I'll send you on your way." Billy interjected. "Come on. Are you really that stubborn, Harrington? You won't accept help from me? Why not?"

Steve bit his tongue, knowing that no answer was the only one likely to hurry Billy along. Never give in to him, that's what he wants.

"Alright." The other boy shrugged and stood up, giving Steve a window view of his crotch that was not needed. "Suit yourself."

Steve watched him turn and walk back to his car. As the Camaro pulled away and drove off, Steve realized that Billy never went into the diner.

Refusing to enter the diner himself, lest his classmates catch sight of him, Steve had no way of contacting anyone for help. He was conscious of the time and his promise to collect Dustin. With little option, he began walking.

It was deathly cold this time of year and it didn't take long for him to regret his decision. Most places were closed this time of night, he had no change for the payphone and he was nowhere near his house. He was even further from Dustin's. He could maybe make it to the Wheelers and use their phone but he didn't feel much like asking his ex's parents for help.

So he walked. Cold and alone.

Then there was the roar.

The Camaro rolled up along side him, slowing down to his pace. Billy already had the window down and a smirk on his face.

"Need a ride?"

Steve could've screamed.

"Get the hell away from me, Billy, I swear to God." He said, shaking.

"Come on, it's freezing out there." Billy threw a hand around the inside of his car. "I've got the heat going in here. Nice and warm, just for you."

"Screw you."

The car rolled along at a gentle three miles an hour.

"Can't we just let bygones be bygones, Harrington?" Billy sighed. "Start over? New leaf?"

Steve flipped him the bird with one steadily freezing finger.

"Looks like frostbite." Billy laughed.

Steve stopped and turned to him. The car stopped with a jolt.

"Asshole! Why would I get in that car with you?" Standing still, he could feel the cold in his bones. "You're a God damn psychopath. Best-case scenario, this is you being way too committed to the 'drive away when they reach for the door handle' gag. At worst? You're probably going to try and actually murder me. So go back to your friends and back to whatever girl you're planning on giving gonorrhea to tonight and leave me the hell alone."

Not interested in a response, Steve turned and continued along the road, hoping that home was closer than he thought. His anger was mostly aimed at himself. Never give in to him, that was the only thing to remember. The bastard thrives on knowing he's fucking with you. But after a night of mounting frustrations, he'd let it out on Billy and Steve knew the son of bitch would be relishing it.

He could hear the hum of the Camaro's engine growing fainter as he continued forward, the car remaining stationary behind him. After a few seconds, however, it began driving towards him. He spun around, expecting to see Billy attempting to hop the curb and ram him. Instead, the car just pulled up next to him. The smirk was gone.

"Steve." Billy said, in a tone of voice alien to him. "It's cold. Get in the car."

It wasn't a demand. It wasn't an attempt at raising his hackles. To Steve, it sounded like an earnest request rooted in something close to concern.

He stood for several seconds, shaking in the cold, unsure what to do.

Against his better judgement, Steve found himself walking around the front of the car, watching Billy as he went. He opened the passenger door and sat in. There was no talking, no radio. Only the roar of the Camaro as it sped down the road.

The warmth was welcome. Everything else about the situation, however, made him very uneasy. He'd been in the car once before, with Max driving. Although he'd feared for his life with her behind the wheel, Steve didn't feel especially safer with her stepbrother there in her stead.

They sat in a tense silence, Billy continuing to drive the long, straight road that Steve had foolishly thought he could hike on his own. The boy hadn't shown so much as a hint of a smile since Steve had gotten into the car. There'd been no taunting and no ridiculing. It made the experience strangely worse.

"Are we going to your place?" Billy asked.

Steve nearly jumped at the sudden sound of his voice.

"What?"

"Where am I driving to?"

Steve looked at his watch.

"Shit, the dance is over."

"You were going to a middle school dance?" Billy cocked an eyebrow.

"What? No." Steve ran a hand through his hair. "I was supposed to pick someone up."

"You know how creepy that sounds, right?"

"Shut the hell up."

They drove in silence for a moment.

"So, where am I going, Harrington?"

Steve imagined Dustin waiting for him outside the school while the other kids left. Surely the others wouldn't leave him? Nancy was there. She'd probably stick around for a while to help clean up. She'd take care of him, make sure he got home. Steve would have to thank her. After he apologized to Dustin.

"Harrington!"

"Jesus, what?"

Billy looked at him for the first time in their drive. Both eyes off the road, he stared at Steve, a quiet rage forming.

"Where do you want to go?"

Steve stared back at him, a little shaken by the growl in the boy's voice.

"Home."

Billy turned back to the road and shook his head. After a moment he glanced back over at Steve.

"Are you gonna give me directions or what?"

"Right, yeah, it's, um, turn left here, keep heading straight." Steve was living on his nerves at that moment. "I'll let you know when we get close."

Billy followed the instructions and they returned to the silence. After a moment, he popped the cigarette lighter and pulled a dented pack of cigarettes from his pocket, removing one with his lips. After lighting it, he shook the pack at Steve.

"I don't smoke." He said, only glancing at the offering for a moment.

"Start." Billy kept his eyes on the road.

"Nah, I quit." He hoped no further explanation would be needed.

Confusion furrowed Billy's brow.

"Why?" The boy seemed baffled as to why anyone would give up.

Taking a deep breathe, Steve prepared himself.

"Well, Nancy –" He started.

"Jesus Christ, Harrington!" Billy sounded almost disappointed with him. "She dumped you, for Christ's sake. It's time to take your balls back."

"Okay, she didn't dump me, alright?" Steve said, defensively. "We... I..."

"Need to take a God damn cigarette out of this pack and smoke it."

Steve saw it as a Catch-22. Take the cigarette, Billy gets to sit in smug satisfaction for the rest of the ride. Don't take it, Billy calls him a pussy for the rest of the ride. He glanced at the pack, a little brown filter inviting him to pull at it.

"I'm alright." He looked out the passenger window.

He heard the pack being flung onto the dashboard. The lack of subsequent taunting surprised him.

Staring out of the window, Steve hoped his car would still be in the lot the next day. Granted, no one was likely to steal a car with a dead battery but there was nothing to say it wouldn't get towed if it was there too long. He mentally kicked himself for sitting there with the radio going for...how long had it been, again?

Something occurred to him.

"You said I was sitting in the car for thirty minutes." He said, looking to Billy. "So, you knew I was in there the whole time?"

Billy threw a glance at him and shrugged.

"Yeah."

"Did anyone else notice?"

"How should I know? It didn't come up." Billy scoffed at him. "You're not everyone's main topic of conversation, Harrington. People give way less of a shit about you than you think they do."

Steve considered this harsh reality. He wasn't sure what was worse. Being laughed at or being insignificant.

"Why the hell were you hiding there anyway?" Billy asked, flicking cigarette ash out the window.

Given the recent revelation that he was not the centre of everyone's universe, Steve felt embarrassed admitting the reason for his actions. To do so would expose a level of conceitedness that extended to believing he couldn't eat a cheeseburger without drawing attention to himself. And that would elicit nothing but ridicule from his driver.

"I fell asleep with the radio on." He lied, poorly.

The other boy sighed, implying he bought none of it.

"Fine, don't tell me. Like most people in this shit heel town, I couldn't care less about you." A smile snuck across Billy's face as they neared the house. "This it?"

Steve nodded and waited for Billy to pass some remark.

"Harrington!" It came quickly. "Living large!"

"Yeah, okay, look, you can drop me off anywhere here." Steve already had his hand on the door handle.

"What's the rush? Mommy and Daddy gonna be worried about you?"

"Something like that, yeah." Steve was ready to jump out as soon as the car slowed down enough.

The car continued its travel straight for the house. Steve said a silent prayer that Billy wouldn't cop the empty driveway and darkened windows. Unfortunately, but unsurprisingly, no one was listening.

"Place looks pretty empty to me."

"Yeah, well..." He began opening the door.

"Wait, there's no way that you have this big place all to yourself tonight, is there?"

Steve had several ideas of where Billy was going with this line of interrogation and not one of them appealed to him.

"Look, man, thanks. It's been weird. I gotta go." Steve was out of the car the instant it hit the driveway.

He didn't put it past Billy to follow him into the house, so he hurried towards the front door and reached for his keys. When his pocket proved empty, he felt like he was turning the ignition on his dead battery again.

"You've got to be kidding me." He sighed.

"Tonight's just not your night, is it, Harrington?"

Steve didn't turn around. He just silently nodded in agreement.

As they circled the back of the house, he threw what he hoped was a subtle glance behind him. Billy was trailing about six feet back, fresh cigarette hanging from his mouth. Steve looked ahead again.

"Look man, you really don't need to stick around." He called back, stopping at another window to see if he could open it.

"I drove you all the way here. Can't have you freezing to death just because you lost your damn key." Billy stopped by the pool. "Have a lot of pool parties here, do we?"

When the window refused to budge, Steve hit it half-heartedly and turned around. He looked from Billy to the pool and back.

"I guess, sometimes." He shrugged.

"Look forward to my invite." Billy smiled.

Steve ignored him and moved onto the next window.

"Christ, just throw a rock through one of them."

With an exhausted sigh, Steve turned to him again.

"Billy, just go. I really don't need your help."

This provoked laughter that Steve didn't like.

"Really?" Billy cocked an eyebrow at him. "Because I'm pretty sure without my help, you'd still be walking the streets of Hawkins like a lost hooker trying to get home."

The choice of metaphor baffled Steve.

"In fact, if you'd taken my help back in the parking lot, you could've saved me all this extra work and driven yourself here. But no." Billy made no attempt to hide his glee at fucking with him. "King Steve's too proud. He'll just walk around in this bullshit Indiana winter, freezing his ass off."

Fed up, Steve turned back to the house.

"Probably caught a cold." He heard Billy continue. "Guess that's something to get you excited, huh? Break out the rectal thermometer and have yourself a party—"

"Billy!" Steve refused to face him, knowing all he wanted was to watch him snap. "Would you just go —"

"Harrington!"

Steve spun around, barely able to control his anger.

"What?!"

Billy was standing by the pool, hands in his back pockets, cigarette burning down to its last. He stared at Steve before slowly raising his

gaze upwards, indicating that the other boy should follow suit. Cautiously, Steve followed his eye line and looked to the side of the house. About twelve feet off the ground was an open bathroom window. Steve's relief was short-lived.

"You want help getting up there, pretty boy?"

Billy enjoyed making Steve uncomfortable. Steve was very aware of this. He would invade his personal space at inappropriate moments, often use the most suggestive language possible when speaking to him and always made sure that Steve knew when he was watching him. He knew Billy only did it to fuck with him. He knew it was all to get a reaction. Yet Steve had to remind himself of this repeatedly when, as he tried to climb through the open bathroom window, one of Billy's supposedly "helpful" hands would start cupping his ass to provide support.

Steve knew that he wanted to get called out for it. So Steve, refusing to give him what he wanted, remained defiantly silent on the matter.

"You almost inside?" He heard Billy asked from beneath him.

"Yeah, almost got it."

He recalled the ease with which he would sneak into Nancy's bedroom and considered how, compared to that, this should have been an easy feat. He conceded that his self-professed "ninja" abilities were likely going the same way as his dissipating basketball skills.

With a firm grip on the inside of the window, he began pulling himself in.

"I'm in." He announced, somewhat prematurely.

"Atta boy, Harrington."

There was a split second of relief when Steve felt Billy's hand move away, only for it to be shattered a moment later when the boy landed a firm and deep slap of encouragement on his ass cheek. It sent Steve tumbling through the window and into the tub.

"Jesus Christ!" He shouted out, every inch of him pained from the hard ceramic.

He could hear laughter through the window.

"Christ, you are one pathetic piece of shit, you know that?" Billy's voice drifted through the window.

Steve was painfully aware of it. He composed himself and stood up in the tub, sticking his head out to look at Billy. With ease, the boy jumped off of the picnic table they'd slid under the window.

"Look, thanks again for all your help." Steve called down, hoping this would be the end of his night. "I gotta go call Dustin's mom and –"

"Let me in." Billy said, in a tone that made Steve think he had no say in the matter.

"What? No–"

"Yeah, I gotta piss."

Steve was too exhausted to keep going.

"Go piss in the woods."

"I'm not gonna go piss in the woods, Harrington. It's freezing out here, my dick'll fall off mid-stream."

Steve berated himself for getting in the damn car.

"Jesus, Billy, would you just –"

"Alright, I'll tell you what." Billy said, raising his hands and seemingly submitting. "It's okay, I'll let myself in."

Steve watched him walk around the side of the house and his blood ran cold. He ran for the bathroom door.

By the time he hit the stairs, the sound of shattering glass was echoing through the empty house. Steve jumped the last three steps and looked around, trying to figure out where Billy would've broken

in. As he reached for the light switch, Steve looked ahead into the kitchen. Enough moonlight shone in for him to see the reflective shards of glass on the tiled floor. Abandoning the light, he strode into the kitchen and prepared to beat the shit out of Billy.

When he entered, however, he was surprised to find all of the windows intact. He took several steps around the room before realising that the shards on the floor were from a freshly broken glass, not a window. He hated himself for walking into the trap.

The whisper came from the darkness behind him, right into his ear.

"Boo."

Steve jumped and spun around. In the shadows, he could just see Billy's outline standing before him.

"Get out." He said, steadying his breathing.

Even in the darkness, he knew that smirk was pointed at him.

"Feel familiar?"

He tried not to get worried, tried to keep his own voice firm.

"I said, get out." He repeated.

"There it is again, déjà vu." He heard the damn smirk in the delivery. "You gonna sucker punch me this time too?"

Steve shook his head in disbelief.

"Is that what this is? You've been waiting to get back at me?"

Forced laughter slipped out of the darkness.

"Back at you for what? I beat the shit out of that pretty face of yours, remember?"

"Yeah. Until your little sister knocked you out." Steve's eyes began to acclimatize to the dark. "Made you her bitch."

Billy took three strides towards him and pushed him into the

backdoor. When Steve went to steady himself, Billy pinned his arms against the hard surface.

"So what does that make you, Harrington?"

This close, Steve could see Billy almost perfectly in the moonlight. His was stone faced. There was no smirk. There were no suggestive flicks of the tongue. There was only an aggression that Steve hadn't seen in him before. It was less malevolent and more anticipatory, as if he was waiting for the right answer before unleashing something. The longer Steve looked into his eyes, the more he realized what it was.

"What's that supposed to mean?" He asked, sure he already understood.

Billy moved forward slightly, pushing against him.

"It means that if I can hand your ass to you on the court. And I can beat you unconscious without breaking a sweat. And I can get under your skin the way I know I do." He blew the hair from Steve's eyes, just to make him blink. "And you still need me to rescue you from the God damn road side like a stranded whore?"

The silence was heavy.

"Then what does that make you, Steve?" Billy's grip tightened when he used his first name.

Steve tried not to start shaking. Never give in to him.

The other boy leaned in until there was barely any space between them. When he spoke again, Steve could feel Billy's breathe on his lips.

"What are you?" He whispered.

Steve swallowed the lump building in his throat and, with it, his pride. He gave Billy what he wanted.

"I'm your bitch."

That smirk. That tongue flick.

"That's right." Billy pivoted to the side and placed a slow kiss on Steve's neck.

The boy's lips against his skin sent a shiver down Steve's spine and his eyes fell shut in a strange moment of relief. After a few seconds, Billy opened his mouth, the warm tip of his tongue brushing against Steve's cold skin. The sensation of teeth gently digging into his flesh soon followed. Steve felt his stomach tighten in surprised excitement. Unfortunately, the unexpected high was short lived. He felt Billy release his grip and, opening his eyes, Steve watched him turn to make his exit. After a moment's recovery, he spoke up.

"Hey."

At this distance, he could only make out the boy's silhouette. He saw it turn back to face him.

"Why did you come over to the car?" He asked. "Why did you follow me?"

There was a pause that followed in which Steve wished he could see the other boy's face. There was no movement in the darkness.

"I don't like the idea of you being all by yourself." Came the eventual response. "Remember that, Harrington. The next time you're home alone."

He watched the silhouette disappear into the shadows.

"By the way," He heard a voice tell him from the next room "the door wasn't locked."

The house echoed with the sound of the front door slamming shut. It wasn't long before he heard the car starting up and pulling away into the night. Alone in the silence, Steve took a long and shaky breathe before sliding onto the floor and staring into the darkness.

2. Chapter 2

"Thanks for letting me know." Steve leaned on the kitchen counter and stared out at the winter morning. "His mom just yelled at me when I called last night."

"Yeah, well, he was kinda upset when you didn't show." Nancy's sympathetic voice crackled down the phone line. "He was just disappointed. You're kind of a big deal to him."

This provided Steve with a surprising moment of warmth. However, concerned that his voice might betray to Nancy what that meant to him, he quickly cleared his throat and continued.

"Look, will you just let him know what happened?" He rubbed his eyes, exhausted after a sleepless night. "If he's over with Mike today, just let him know."

"Sure. You are gonna talk to him, though, right?"

"Yeah, I'll try and get him before school tomorrow or something. I don't think I'd be welcome at the Henderson house for a while."

Nancy's silence was as good as a confirmation.

After a call to Dustin's had put him at the receiving end of a scolding from Mrs. Henderson, Steve had phoned Nancy in the hopes that she could fill him in on what had happened in his absence. Just as he'd expected, she had made sure Dustin was okay after the dance, securing him a ride home with Jonathan and Will. It had hurt Steve when she'd told him that the running theory was that he'd simply flaked on the kid.

"I'll ask Jonathan to pick you up and take you to your car." She offered. "You can jump-start it from his."

Steve cringed at the thought of being rescued by his ex's new boyfriend.

"Sure." He said, masking his bitterness. "Thanks."

The story he'd told Nancy was a revised account of the truth. In his version, he'd sat in the diner and ate his meal with some guys from basketball, accidentally leaving his lights on outside and running down the battery. Then he'd simply hitched a ride from one of them. No mention of hiding in his car. No mention of losing his keys. Not a word about Billy.

"Steve?" She said, eventually.

"Yeah?"

"Are you okay?"

Had the question been asked in person, Nancy likely would have figured out the answer for herself. The night's activities had left him exhausted, skin pale and eyes sunken. Beyond walking in the midnight cold and falling through a window, his sickly appearance was worsened by the fact that he'd spent the better part of the night walking around his empty house, drinking beer and replaying choice moments of his bizarre evening with Billy.

He'd tried to wrap his head around the boy's aggressive attempts at helpfulness and what appeared to be as genuine an act of concern as he was capable. Steve tried to understand why he'd stuck around for so long, let alone approached him in the first place. As for those final moments, Steve had ran through them repeatedly in an attempt to understand what had happened or, more accurately, to understand his own reaction to what happened. Because while he struggled with what the boy had said to him and how close he'd brought his body to Steve's, the one thing that plagued him more than anything was how every time he remembered Billy's lips pressing into his skin, Steve's stomach would tighten and the hairs on his neck stood on end. Every damn time.

"Yeah, Nance. I'm fine." He said, quietly. "Just tired."

While the passenger seat of Jonathan's car had felt safer than the one in the Camaro, the journey had been by no means less awkward. Despite exchanging pleasantries when Jonathan picked him up, the two had proceeded to sit in relative silence for most of the drive.

Steve had tried small talk, thanking him for the ride, the jump-start and for looking after Dustin after the dance. The last one had proven difficult for him. He mildly resented the fact that Jonathan had been there for the kid when he wasn't.

When Jonathan's well-intentioned but minimal responses implied that small talk was only going to worsen the situation, Steve had eventually given up. Being left to his thoughts, however, proved worse than the uncomfortably idle conversation.

He considered the sad state of affairs that was his social life if he needed his ex-girlfriend to help him with his car troubles. Worse than needing Nancy to facilitate a jump-start was the fact that Jonathan had actually agreed to do it. Steve hadn't spent long wondering, had the boyfriend roles been reversed, whether he would have done the same for Jonathan. He knew the answer and he got the impression that Jonathan knew it too. Driving to the diner, he had clearly been as uncomfortable as Steve. Yet, there he was, sacrificing his Sunday afternoon to help some friendless dumbass who'd let his battery run down in the middle of the night. He was doing it for the girl he loved. The girl Steve loved.

The journey was one long reminder that the love of his life had moved on to a better guy.

Jumper cables secured, Steve turned the ignition on his car. The engine roared to life.

"Thank Christ." He sighed, throwing his head back on the seat.

Jonathan smiled through the window at him.

"Sounds good."

"Yeah, man, thanks." Steve stepped out of the car, leaving it running. "I really owe you one."

Jonathan shrugged and waved it off.

"Don't worry about it. Nancy was worried about you..." He trailed off, clearing registering that that wasn't what Steve wanted to hear.

Swallowing his pride with a forced smile, Steve nodded.

"Yeah, she's...great like that."

Steve tapped his fingers on the hood of his car as he watched Jonathan begin gathering up the jumper cables. He calculated how long it would've taken Jonathan to drive to his place and out to the diner and how long the journey back home would take. He thought about offering the guy gas money.

Then the voice returned. The same voice that had kept him fearful of his peers the night before. It painted a picture of Nancy asking Jonathan to take pity on him, to think about how sad and lonely he was. He saw the two of them agreeing that the least they could do for the hopeless sack was to help him out.

He hadn't asked for their help. He hadn't asked for their pity.

Steve slammed the hood down, causing Jonathan to jump.

"I got shit to do." He sat into the car, pulling the door shut. "I'll see ya."

He pulled out of the parking lot like a bolt. The entire journey home was made in silence, Steve trying desperately not to think about being alone again when he got home.

His plan to go for a swim in order to clear his head might have worked, had he had it in him to actually get into the pool. Instead, he sat in a deck chair, eyes glued to the water's grey reflection of the winter sky. He'd made it as far as getting his swim trunks on and sat exposed in the cold air, nursing the second-to-last can of beer in the house.

The cold stung his skin and he knew that it was the last thing his exhausted body needed. But he sat, letting himself shake slightly as the sun began to set. Occasionally his eyes would grow heavy and his head would roll to the side. However, as with the previous night, he found that any attempt at sleep would bring into sharp focus the memory of being pressed against the backdoor. He'd feel a bite at his

neck, a shiver would run down his spine and he'd be awake. Such was the pattern.

He'd stopped trying to understand why it plagued him like it did. He didn't want to think about it anymore. He didn't want to think about anything. He wanted to drink himself asleep and hope that tomorrow his life would be different.

"I thought I told you I don't like you being all alone."

Steve felt everything inside himself tighten.

"I had to come all the way here and find you like this." The voice grew nearer as a pair of boots crossed the concrete. "Still no parents in sight, no one keeping an eye on you."

His instincts told him to get up, turn around and face the oncoming intruder. He didn't move.

Billy stopped just behind the deck chair. Steve could feel him there. A leather jacket landed on the ground next to him and he sensed the other boy squat down behind him. A whisper crept into his ear.

"You know what could happen to you? Sitting here all alone?"

Steve stared into the pool.

"What?" He asked, quietly.

He could hear a quick grunt of satisfaction from behind him.

"Well, somebody could just come up behind you..."

He felt a hand slowly reach around his throat, gripping it gently.

"Grab you. Push you into the dirt." Billy pushed his lips into Steve's ear. "Hold you down..."

A second hand slipped around his waist, fingers grazing his crotch for a brief moment.

"They'd do whatever they wanted to you. You wouldn't be able to

stop them." A set of teeth nicked at his ear. "Truth is, you wouldn't really want to."

Steve could see down to the swelling in his trunks. There was no way of missing it.

"You'd pretend to fight back." Billy dragged his finger just above Steve's waistband, inches from his hardening dick. "You'd beg them to stop, hoping it'd make them go at you harder."

The grip on his throat tightened and his heart started racing.

"You'd be out here, in the open, filthy and alone." The hand at his waist ran slowly over the bulge in his pants. "No one around to see you secretly enjoying it."

Suddenly the grip on his throat released. It did nothing to steady his breathing.

"So I guess it's a good thing I'm here." He received a light slap on the cheek before he felt the bulk of Billy Hargrove stand up behind him and walk away.

When he was sure the other boy was gone, Steve's hand shot down his shorts and he began stroking himself to the images still fresh in his mind. He imagined the grip around his neck and squeezed himself at the thought of it. He winced at the pain but continued.

Eventually he let out one forceful moan, which rang out around the garden. He lay there for a minute, eyes turned to the sky and his hand, warm and sticky, still wrapped around his softening cock. The cold seemed less intense than it had earlier.

Forcing himself out of the chair, Steve wiped his hand on his towel and turned to the house. He froze on the spot.

"What was that about, I wonder?" Billy, leaning against the backdoor, took a swig from Steve's last can of beer and threw him a smile.

Quickly regaining his composure, Steve picked up the sticky towel and strode towards the house. He pushed Billy aside, entering the kitchen without meeting his eye.

He headed straight for the laundry room, throwing the towel into the machine more aggressively than intended. A moment later, the voice appeared again, just outside the laundry room door.

"What's got your panties all in a bunch?"

He slammed the machine door shut and spun around.

Steve finally understood why the memory of the previous night refused to leave him. He was sick of feeling pathetic. He was sick of feeling like he was falling and hitting every damn rock on the way down. And for some reason, when those hands grabbed him and those lips hit his skin, it all went away. No more Nancy bullshit clouding his head. No more voice telling him how far he'd fallen. It all disappeared.

And that was why he reacted like he did, why his stomach tightened and his breathe sped up. Because he didn't want to feel any of it anymore. And now he had a way to make it go away.

"I'm getting real tired of your bullshit." He squared up to Billy. "Of you pulling this crap and then..."

Billy cocked an eyebrow.

"And then' what?"

Steve paused for a moment.

"And never following through." He finished.

The smirk.

"Careful, Harrington. You sure you know what you're asking for?"

"I know what I want." He insisted. "I'm just starting to wonder if you can deliver. Might be all talk, no action. Maybe when it comes to it, you'll pussy out -"

Billy closed the short space between them with one step, silencing him immediately. Despite his goading, Steve shook with nerves.

"Turn the fuck around."

The tightness from earlier returned. Despite some mild trepidation, Steve turned his back and faced the machines. The sound of Billy's belt unbuckling made him twitch.

"Drop your pants."

His breathe speeding up, Steve ran his hands under his wasit band and pulled down his shorts, letting them slide to his ankles. He felt a hand ram into his back and he stumbled into the dryer, just managing to steady himself. The sound of spit hitting skin told him that Billy was getting himself ready.

"Bend over." His voice seemed slightly more strained now.

Steve slowly lowered the upper half of his body over the machine. He received a sharp kick to the inside of each leg, sending them further apart.

"I want them spread wide." Billy was closer now, standing right behind him.

Steve felt a hand grip the back of his hair, right at the roots. It hurt but he forced himself to ignore the instinct to fight back, keeping both hands planted on the top of the machine. The sensation of a pair of wet fingers slipping into him brought a strange combination of shock and relief.

"Jesus, you're tight as hell." Steve flinched as the digits began moving. "I'm gonna have to stretch you out."

Billy didn't spend long getting him ready, however. Within a minute, he was removing the massaging fingers and replacing them with his own tip. In those painful first moments Steve wished the boy had spent longer preparing him.

With each thrust, the pain increased but so too did the satisfaction. Unsure what else to do, Steve shut his eyes and breathed through it, enjoying the discomfort more than he'd expected. At one point the hand in his hair gave a tug and he could feel his cock start to swell. He let out a groan.

"That's what I wanna hear." Billy suddenly began to increase his speed. "You like it, don't you?"

Steve was almost afraid to answer. He felt the other boy go deeper into him and he moaned.

"I like it." He let out.

"I don't know." Steve's semi suddenly had a hand wrapped around it. "I think you're just saying that."

The hand in his hair released its hold and slid down to his hip.

"I think you could be a little more excited."

Unsure what to do, Steve began moving slightly in time with Billy. The other boy let go of his dick and gripped both hips.

"Not like that." With a sharp pull he brought Steve's hips backwards as he thrust forwards.

The sensation was sudden and alarming. Steve instinctively tried to move away but Billy grasped him firmly, pushing and pulling Steve's hips in counter-rhythm with his own movements.

"Come on, Harrington, stay with me."

Steve bit his lip as he grew accustomed to the movement. Soon he felt confident in his motion and reached for Billy's hands to remove them. The other boy was quicker and grabbed his wrists, pinning them to the top of the machine. The pressure stiffened Steve's cock further.

"Let's see how we're doing, shall we?" One wrist was freed and Billy's hand wrapped around Steve's dick again. "That's more like it. See that tells me you're having fun. That tells me I can go as deep as I want."

This last remark sent a brief flash of worry through his mind but when Billy started stroking Steve's cock, concern was quickly replaced with relief. After a few moments, however, Billy sent a forceful thrust into him, sending him stumbling forward slightly. Knowing that every inch of Billy was driving into him now, Steve felt a simultaneous rush of pain and euphoria. He didn't know if he could

physically take it much longer but begged himself to keep going. Billy continued to jerk him off.

"You like it, don't you?" He repeated.

Steve let out a series of small moans with each stroke and each thrust. Billy squeezed his pinned wrist tightly, sending a shooting pain up his arm.

"I asked you a question, pretty boy."

Steve nodded.

"I like it."

Billy released his wrist and gripped his hair again, yanking his head backwards.

"Say it louder, Harrington."

Steve forced out a yell.

"I like it!"

"What do you like?"

His head was swimming.

"I like your dick inside of me."

Billy began stroking him faster.

"And do you like this?"

"Yeah, I like that. I..." He had to pause as he felt the beginnings of his orgasm.

"You like me jerking you off?"

"I fucking love it." Steve winced.

"If you had to choose." Billy was breathing just as heavily as he was.
"If you had to chose between coming right now or having me come

inside of you, which would you want?"

Steve was going to go off at any minute. He shut his eyes.

"I want you to come inside of me."

Billy let go of his cock and released his hair, gripping both of his hips again. He sent several forceful thrusts into Steve, some of which elicited yells of welcome pain. When he felt Billy empty out inside of him, Steve could've collapsed. After a moment, Billy began to back out of him.

Steve leaned against the machine and tried to catch his breathe. His dick began to ache from a lack of attention and he quickly reached down and finished what Billy had started. Creamy white trails spurted onto his hand and stomach but he didn't care. The relief was indescribable. Still supporting himself against the machine, he turned slightly to look at Billy.

He watched in silence as the other boy secured himself back into his jeans. Aside from some deep breathing that was already steadying itself, he seemed wholly unaffected by the experience. By the time he was buckling his belt, it was as if nothing had happened.

The confusing lack of reaction from Billy made Steve feel slightly ashamed of how elated he felt. However, as the post-coital excitement began to subside, he started to slowly succumb to the residual pain. Flinching, he placed a hand behind himself and found his fingertips came back covered in blood-streaked cum. Billy must've spotted this.

"You'll be okay." He heard him say, in the same earnest voice from the previous night's car journey. "It'll hurt but you'll be okay."

Steve just stared at the red and white residue.

"Steve?"

This roused his attention back to Billy. There was an uncharacteristically human look in the boy's eyes.

"Maybe you should lie down."

Steve shook his head and began stranding up straight.

"Nah, I'm fine, I'm –"

He winced at the pain that moving brought to him. Carefully, he pulled his shorts up and, avoiding the other boy's eye, walked slowly out of the room. Billy made no attempt to follow. Making his way to the living room, Steve eased himself onto the couch, careful to lie on his side.

It was a good minute before Billy appeared. He'd retrieved the beer he'd been drinking earlier and Steve watched him down the remains. He expected the can to be thrown across the room, or even at him, but instead Billy planted it down on a nearby table. The boy began gently slapping around his pockets, clearly looking for something. When a glance through the window sent Billy out of the room, Steve figured that he'd just remembered leaving his jacket by the pool.

Now alone, Steve looked to the clock on the mantle and watched the second hand make its cyclical journey. The otherwise quiet stillness of the room brought to focus every sensation Steve was feeling. He was aware of his breathing. He felt every drop of blood, sweat and cum that was slowly drying on his body. More than anything, he felt strangely relieved.

The click of a lighter brought his attention back to the doorway. Billy, sliding a Zippo into his newly retrieved jacket, took a drag from his cigarette and kept both eyes on a far corner of the room.

"You're out of beer." He exhaled.

It was the first thing either of them had said in a while and Steve didn't really have a response.

Billy's gaze turned towards him but didn't reach his eyes. Instead, it landed somewhere around his cum stained stomach. Steve figured he looked filthy but made no attempt to wipe himself off.

"You look good." Billy said, slipping his cigarette back between his lips.

With the unexpected remark, he turned around and left the room.

Steve waited for the front door to slam. Instead, he heard two gentle clicks as it was opened and carefully shut. Returned to the stillness, he slowly closed his eyes and felt sleep wash over him.

3. Chapter 3

The slam of the front door barely roused him. The sight of a six-pack hitting the coffee table was what jolted him awake. Despite his respite, he still felt exhausted. The sleep had been so sudden and deep that it had scarcely affected him. Dazed and forgetting himself, he sat up, only to gasp at the pain that ran through him.

"Told you I'd have to stretch you out."

Steve looked up and saw Billy throwing his jacket on a nearby armchair, a freshly lit cigarette hanging from his lips. He smoked like a damn chimney. Steve watched as the blonde pulled a can from the collection on the table, cracked it open and took a large swig. As Billy swallowed, he surveyed Steve's pained sitting position on the couch.

"Right where I left you." He shook his head slightly. "Didn't even try to clean yourself up."

"What are you doing back here?" It came out quieter than Steve would have liked.

Billy frowned, tapping once on the side of his beer can.

"I told you. You were out of beer."

Steve wished he had it in him to stand up. He didn't enjoy having to look up at Billy.

"I didn't ask you to –"

"Did I say it was for you?" Billy laughed slightly before taking another drink.

The laugh was what did it. So damn cocky, Steve couldn't handle it.

"What the hell are you doing here?" He demanded, his voice stronger than before. "And how the hell did you get in earlier?"

Billy shook his head again, exhaling a large plum of smoke in Steve's direction.

"You need to start locking that door, Harrington. You keep forgetting about it and it's gonna get you into real trouble one of these days."

Steve looked away and leaned carefully backwards into the couch. He felt an ache in his back, residual damage from his crash landing in the bathtub the night before. Being bent over the dyer must have worsened it.

"Honestly," The boy continued, flicking ash onto the wooden table. "I took it as an open invitation. I show up here to see if you need me to go jump-start that engine and then I find the door's unlocked. Made me think, 'He really is asking for it isn't he?'"

Billy took a few steps towards the couch. Reflexes kicking in, Steve's eyes shot up towards him.

"Then, of course, you did." The smirk made its grand return. "Ask for it."

Despite the quick blush of shame he felt spread across his face, Steve resisted the urge to look away again.

He was expecting Billy to mess with him. He expected to be called faggot and queer and, for one horrifying moment, he even thought that he would suddenly see a group of kids from school jump out of hiding, ready to ridicule him or beat him up. Worried as he was, though, Steve refused to look away. He wouldn't give Billy that satisfaction.

However, rather than start hurling abuse at him, Billy just took another mouthful of beer and continued to stare down at Steve. Eventually, the smug smile faded away. After a long drag from his cigarette, the same flash of humanity from earlier reappeared in the boy's eyes.

"You regret it?"

The question caught him off guard. It was the most sincere Steve had ever heard him. For several long seconds he was too afraid to answer. His insides continued their painful throbbing.

"No." He finally heard himself say.

For a moment, the two stared at each other in silence, neither one making any movement. Finally, Billy nodded slightly and placed the can on the table next to them. Slipping his cigarette between his lips, he eased himself down in front of Steve until they were eye to eye. Kneeling in front of him, he pushed himself between the boy's legs. Steve winced.

"I really did a number on you, didn't I?" Billy remarked with a vaguely triumphant smile.

Steve was about to reject the idea when he felt Billy's hands slip around his waist, cradling the base of his spine. Suddenly the need for prideful lying didn't feel as strong.

"Maybe." He offered.

One hand began gliding up and down the lower half of his back. The dull ache began to slip away.

"And I bet you loved every second of it." Billy's eyes fell to Steve's chest and moved down his abdomen.

Steve took a few seconds before answering.

"Maybe." He repeated.

Billy smiled at the response and pulled a hand from Steve's waist, removing the cigarette from between his lips.

"Maybe?" He leaned down and blew a small stream of smoke against Steve's skin before biting down on his hip.

Steve bit back a gasp of pain.

"I bet you loved every second of it." He repeated, holding the cigarette slightly too close to Steve's stomach. "Didn't you?"

Giving Billy the answer he wanted wasn't the hard part. The hard part was admitting it was the truth.

"Yeah. I did." Steve found himself gripping tightly at the arm of the couch.

Another smug smile flashed across Billy's face.

"You know how I knew?" He asked, running his finger along the slowly rising bite mark. "You know how I knew you'd love being fucked like that?"

Steve was starting to shake slightly. The boy's eyes were clouded with the same hungry aggression from the previous night.

"No."

Billy flicked ash onto the floor before pointing the cigarette at him.

"Yes you do." He insisted.

The hand that remained on Steve's back clutched at him, nails pressed lightly into his skin.

"Come on." He continued. "You got it right last night. Different question, same answer."

Steve stared at him. Billy slipped the cigarette back between his lips, awaiting the response.

"Do you know...how I knew...you'd love...being fucked...like that?" He recited it like a prompt.

Steve nodded slightly, working up the courage to speak.

A smile twitched at the corner of Billy's mouth as he returned his hands to the base of Steve's spine.

"Come on." He smiled. "I have to hear you say it."

Steve made sure to speak loudly. He didn't want to say his line with a shake in his voice.

"Because I'm your bitch."

Billy leaned into him, the pressure worsening the pain on his insides.

"You are getting so good at saying that." Billy slid his fingers under the back of Steve's waistband, inches from the source of his pain.

"Don't." Steve flinched and grabbed at Billy's arms. "Don't do that."

The hands eased off and Billy pulled himself back. His face changed in an instant, back to the earnest expression that always seemed to appear right when Steve needed it to.

"Harrington." He said, voice quieter. "You'll be okay."

Despite the fear that Billy had managed to provoke in him, Steve let go of his arms and relaxed slightly.

Billy plucked the cigarette from his lips and reached forward, holding the filter inches from Steve's mouth.

"Let's see if I can't get your mind off it." A sliver of smoke escaped as he spoke.

Earlier on, Steve had rationalized his mental preoccupation with Billy as being a need for relief and escape. The decision to act as he did had been impulsive. He hadn't considered what would happen afterwards, he only knew what he wanted in that moment.

He'd gotten his relief. He'd escaped the bombarding ridicule in his head. So he couldn't quite figure out why he was still so desperate for whatever else Billy had to offer.

Steve placed his hand around the boy's wrist and took the cigarette into his mouth.

He sat there, taking his first drag in almost a year, as the other boy began carefully pulling down his trunks. Soon, the pain was no longer an issue. Once Billy was working on him, all lips and tongue and resilient gag reflex, any sense of discomfort disappeared. His head fell back and he just enjoyed it. He never took a second drag from the cigarette. It remained idle between his fingers for the entire encounter.

When it was over, Billy used what remained in the beer can to wash down Steve's load. He picked the burnt out butt from Steve's hand and flicked it onto the floor before moving to sit in the armchair across from him. Cracking open a second can, he looked around the

room.

"Who the hell has a place like this to themselves all weekend and doesn't have a party?"

Steve, swimming in post-blow job endorphins, snorted at the idea. Not so long ago, it would have been a given. In light of his diminishing social standing at Hawkins, however, he couldn't imagine a Harrington party having much pull nowadays.

"Too busy." He said, succinctly.

"Yeah, looked that way last night." Billy put his feet up on the table.

Not interested in going further on the topic, Steve casually gave him the finger and hoped he'd lose interest. Sure enough, Billy seemed to read the lazy reaction as a lack of engagement and went back to surveying the room.

Something on the bookcase caught the boy's interest, pulling him up and across to the shelf. Though Billy was no longer facing him, Steve noted that his gaze seemed to be hovering over Steve's childhood photos.

After a minute of drumming his fingers on the arm of the couch, Steve decided to overcome his fear and address what he felt to be the elephant in the room.

"So." He cleared his throat. "Are we gonna talk about..."

Billy made no attempt to turn around when he spoke.

"About what, Harrington?"

The voice was enough. It said everything it needed to say with those three words. It told Steve exactly where they stood and exactly what would happen if he finished his sentence. As much as he hated himself for backing down, he didn't bother saying anything else.

Billy turned from the bookcase and threw his eyes to the fireplace. When they landed on the clock, he sighed.

"Shit." He put his beer can on the shelf behind him.

Curiosity quickly replaced Steve's sense of rejection.

"What?" He asked.

"I have to pick this chick up in an hour. I gotta shower."

Without another word, Billy began heading for the door, pulling his largely already unbuttoned shirt over his head and flinging it behind him. Steve, caught off guard again, took a moment to catch up.

"Wait, what are you –" Steve gave up when the boy left the room. "God damn it."

As quickly and as carefully as he could, Steve pushed himself from the couch and followed Billy out. The boy was half way up the stairs and already undoing his jeans when Steve yelled after him. He paused and turned around, unperturbed.

"What?"

There was a moment of perplexed silence before Steve managed to say anything.

"What are you doing?" He asked, shaking his head.

Billy began removing his boots.

"I'm going to go take a shower." He ran his eyes over Steve. "You need one too. I'd tell you to come with me and make it interesting but I don't have a lot of time so unless you're offering to blow me while I wash up, this'll have to be a solo one."

Steve couldn't tell if this was a flippant insult or a genuine offer for sex. However, when Billy continued to stare at him expectantly for several seconds, Steve had his answer. Unsure how else to respond, he shook his head slightly.

"No." He said, eventually. "Thanks."

Billy shrugged, abandoned his shoes and jeans on the stairs and

continued heading up.

Steve slowly made his way to the kitchen and poured a glass of water. As he drank, he heard the shower start up. The thought that he'd made the wrong choice only stayed in his mind for a moment.

Despite the night sky reducing the back yard to an icebox, he ventured out to the poolside once again. The hairs across his skin stood on end in the cold and he cracked open one of Billy's beers with shaking hands. The chill was bothering him less and less, though. Now, he somewhat embraced the numbing sensation.

He ran through the evening's events in his mind. For as much as the whole endeavour had been successful in quelling his paranoia, pessimism and sense of ennui, it had, unfortunately, left Steve with a new obstacle. What remained was the harsh realization that Billy Hargrove's cock had made all his problems go away.

"Shit." He whispered, knocking back the can in an attempt to clear his head.

He'd just needed to get laid. Surely, now, he would be fine. The therapy may have been unconventional but he'd done it and he felt the better for it.

But that wasn't getting laid. That was getting fucked. It had hurt and it had scared him and, Billy was right, he had loved it. And it hadn't been the end of it. While rejecting the offer of a blow job, regardless of who's offering, would be a wasted opportunity, he could've said no. He'd gotten what he'd wanted from Billy by that point. His head was clear. But when it came to it, all he'd wanted was more.

He told himself it wasn't about Billy. It wasn't about who or where, it was about getting off with someone other than himself, an experience he hadn't had in a while. This was drastically different to what he was used to, though. And no matter how scary it got, there was always that moment of reassurance. Right when he needed it, Billy would tell him he'd be okay. And in spite of everything that asshole had done in the past, Steve had believed him.

He shut his eyes tight. God damn it. It was about Billy.

Just as Steve took a final gulp, he heard someone moving behind him. Despite his mounting concerns, he welcomed the sound of boots on concrete and found himself fighting the urge to smile.

He turned around but before he could say anything, Billy slapped the can out of his hand and grabbed him by the back of the neck, dragging him closer to the pool.

"Asshole, what the hell are you – " Steve didn't get a chance to finish, the forceful push he received to his chest propelling all the air from his lungs.

He saw the stars for a brief moment before he hit the pool. As acclimatized as he was becoming to the cold weather, the sudden impact with the freezing water was too much for his body. Shock ran through him and he made the rookie mistake of gasping. Fortunately he was able to reach the surface quickly enough to spray the liquid from his lungs before any damage was done. Gasping in the fresh air, he glared up at Billy, who was squatting next to the pool.

"What the hell was that?!"

A hand shot out and grabbed Steve under the jaw, holding his face in place. Billy forced him to meet his gaze. His eyes were dark.

"You need a jump start, I offer to help you." There was a deathly growl in his voice. "You need a ride home, I oblige. You ask me to fuck you and I rip you up so bad you can barely fucking sit down."

Billy's other hand reached out and gripped Steve's wet hair at the roots. He tried not to wince.

"And you return my generosity by drinking my God damn beer?"

Steve's head was suddenly forced under the water with alarming pressure, only for Billy to pull him to the surface again a moment later. Gasping, Steve reached for the boy's hands. His attempts at pulling them away only reinforced the grip.

"You're an ungrateful little shit." Billy spat. "You know what I do to

ungrateful little shits?"

Suddenly, Billy released his grip and Steve's breathe caught in his chest. Then the boy began laughing. Steve's whole body sagged in the water.

"You son of a bitch."

"Christ, Harrington." Billy stood up, laughing manically. "I think the water went yellow."

Steve pulled himself out of the pool and sized himself up to the other boy.

"You're a God damn asshole."

Billy smiled and spread his arms out.

"Lighten up!" He looked Steve up and down. "You really are scared of me, aren't you?"

Steve ignored the impulse to say 'yes' and just gave a cocky half smile.

"No, Billy, I'm not scared of you." He hoped he sounded like he was telling the truth. "Once I watch somebody drink down my spunk, I don't really see them as a threat."

Rather than come at him, Billy simply smiled, biting his lip slightly.

"I don't know, Harrington, you might wanna rethink that logic." He threw a glance down at Steve's crotch. "I might decide to take a bite the next time I'm down there."

He gave Steve a soft slap on the cheek.

"Stay out of trouble while I'm gone."

With a smile, Billy headed back into the house, no doubt headed straight for the front door and off to whatever girl he'd lured into a date. Steve stayed where he was, wet and cold, trying not to smile at the use of the words 'next time'.

4. Chapter 4

Come Monday morning, skipping school had had a serious allure to it. While his mind remained a moderately lighter place to inhabit, Steve's body was suffering the lasting effects of Saturday night's ordeal. Exposure and exhaustion alone had nearly wiped him out but the addition of his increasingly painful backache made the idea of staying at home in his sweats all the more appealing. With a few days left before his parent's return, there would be no one haranguing him for playing hookey.

Yet rather than lying in bed watching TV, he found himself standing at the bike racks outside Hawkins Middle School in the early morning chill. Unfortunately for his frozen, battered body, there were some things too important to skip out on.

He'd been waiting for ten minutes when a familiar baseball cap caught his attention.

"Hey dipshit." He smiled.

Dustin reciprocated but Steve could tell that there was a falseness behind it. As the kid began dismounting his bike, Steve was left struggling with what to say.

"So, I tried calling yesterday but your mom –"

"Yeah, sorry about that." Dustin looked away from him and began locking his bike. "She was kinda pissed."

"Hey, I get it. Look, I messed up." Steve ran his hand through his hair. "Did Nancy explain –"

"Yeah. She did." Bike secured, Dustin began rooting through his bag for something.

Steve didn't like the lack of eye contact he was getting and the abrupt, vaguely restrained tone of voice was hugely out of character for Dustin. It made him worry. If the kid was pissed, Steve expected to be called a few names, made fun of for a few minutes, he'd

retaliate and then they'd go about their business. This wasn't what was happening.

"Good." Steve ducked his head slightly, trying to catch the kid's attention. "You know I'm sorry, right?"

"Uh-huh." Dustin continued rooting and Steve knew he was trying to avoid looking at him.

"So, how did it go?" He asked, as if Nancy hadn't explained the whole disaster to him already.

Dustin finally met his gaze. For a moment, Steve selfishly hoped he would unload all of the upsetting details. Steve would console him, tell him that life could be shitty but that he'd kick ass next time. Recite the lies he had prepared for the other night.

"Fine." A half-hearted smile appeared for a moment. "It went great."

He was surprised how much it hurt to watch Dustin lie to him.

"I told you, buddy." He smiled through it.

Dustin simply nodded and began heading towards the school. Steve, taking a deep breathe before moving, tried to follow him.

"Dipshit." He called after him.

The kid turned around, looking wholly indifferent to anything he had to say.

"We're good, yeah?" Steve asked, trying to hide his concern.

Dustin nodded once.

"Yeah, Steve. We're good." He glanced behind him. "Look, I gotta see Mr. Clarke before class so..."

Steve watched silently as Dustin turned and headed towards the building. He knew better than to go after him again. He'd seen that look of disappointment on enough faces to know when to give up.

"You just left me there!"

The yell echoed through the hallway, somehow overpowering the collective murmur of the sixty or so students roaming the corridor. Steve was one of many who leaned back from their lockers to observe the source of the ruckus.

A stone-faced Billy Hargrove strolled down the hall, paying little heed to the raging young woman rushing after him.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" She called out. "You abandon me at that diner and then I hear you go out the next night with Lauren Solomon?"

Groups spattered around the scene began whispering to each other. Steve, vaguely recognizing the girl as Cynthia Something from English, turned back to his locker but kept an ear on the one sided argument.

"Do you have any idea how embarrassing that was?" Cynthia yelled.

"Yeah, I have an idea." Billy muttered.

Steve couldn't help but laugh slightly.

"Are you making fun of me?" Cynthia stopped her march, evidently shocked at Billy's remark.

Steve could see Billy in the corner of his eye, slowing to a stop further down the hallway. The boy turned and slowly walked back to the enraged young woman. They stood only a few feet from Steve's locker.

"Baby." Billy purred.

Steve, hearing the deep, manipulative voice, rolled his eyes.

"First off, I get it." Billy spoke with a wholly false sincerity. "The pressure that comes with being called the Blow Job Queen of Hawkins High must suck. Like if you don't blow every single guy here, you're just not deserving of the crown."

The hallway became painfully quiet.

"But you should know that if you're looking for an actual date, you probably shouldn't start the night by sucking the guy's dick five minutes after he picks you up. I mean, what's the point in even taking you anywhere if you're just gonna blow me in your parents driveway?"

A series of frantic whispers and hushed laughter spread through the throng of spectators.

"So you should know, when that happens, the guy won't always feel like sticking around to listen to you babble on about...Christ, it was so boring I blanked it out...No, if he's smart, he'll just get the hell out of there. And if he's lucky, he'll find something better to do the next night. Hotter, skinnier. Hasn't spent more time on their knees than a God damn nun."

Steve felt slightly sick listening to the abuse the girl was getting. But like everyone else, he did nothing to stop it.

"Oh, and I don't need to make fun of you. Everybody already thinks you're a joke."

He heard the undeniable sound of a firm slap across the face, echoed by a series of gasps. He turned his head slightly to see Cynthia Something running down the hallway, eyes full of tears.

One by one, people began moving, shutting lockers and reverting back to previous conversations. As he went to close his own, a hand shot forward and shut it for him.

"Don't pretend that wasn't your fault." A voice whispered in his ear.

Steve spun around to face Billy, only to find him already heading down the corridor.

"You're kidding?" Steve called after him.

The boy stopped and turned around. Cheek red from Cynthia's retaliation, he seemed unimpressed.

"What was I supposed to say?" He shrugged, casually walking back towards the locker. "That I had to drag your ass home?"

"Asshole, what is the matter with you?" Steve was furious but tried desperately to keep his voice down. "I don't care what you say but, Jesus, you don't humiliate her like that in front of everybody."

The bell rang out, hurrying the crowd around them. No one seemed to be listening in on them.

"She was following me since I parked my damn car, the bitch was getting on my nerves." Billy was far too cavalier when explaining himself, as if his actions were wholly justified. "Why do you even care?"

"No one calls her that." Steve shook his head in disgust. "I barely know that girl, she's nobody. No one calls her...that."

"Yeah, I know." Billy smiled. "They will now though."

Steve dropped his books and gripped Billy's collar, hurling him against the lockers. The boy just laughed.

"What now, Harrington?" He goaded.

Before Steve had time to think, Billy head-butted him, sending him stumbling backwards. Steve felt a grip at the back of his neck and he was forced up against the lockers. Billy twisted his arm behind his back and held him in place. The action drew a small crowd of those not yet headed for class

"Christ, you're too easy, you know that?" Billy lowered his voice. "I mean, I knew. I had you bent over and begging for it and I didn't even have to buy you dinner."

With his free hand, Steve reached behind him and grabbed. He knew that, after the unsportsmanlike act of kicking a dude in the balls, pulling a guy's hair was the least acceptable way to get the upper hand in a fight. However, he was too angry to care about how masculine his actions were. The minute he felt something, he pulled. Billy yelled into his ear.

"Motherfucker!"

Steve's body was released from the lockers. He spun around and saw Billy doubled over with his head in his hands. The small crowd seemed horrified.

After a moment's confusion, Steve realized that his fingers felt wet. He slowly looked down to his hand, surprisingly bereft of blonde mullet strands, and unfurled his clenched fist. Along with a scattering of hairs and a spray of blood, Billy's earring lay across his palm.

"Oh shit." Steve let out. "Oh shit. Oh shit."

He looked back at Billy, slowly rising to his full height again. Hand clasped to a bloodied ear, rage filling his eyes, the boy looked horrifying.

"Oh shit." Steve was caught in a loop.

Billy did not, however, charge at him. He stood there for a moment, shaking slightly, either with rage or shock, and simply stared at Steve. Suddenly, a parting was made in the crowd and a pair of teachers came careening into the arena.

"Break it up you two...Jesus." Mr. Harris, a biology teacher with a famously weak stomach, stared in horror at the blood dripping down Billy's neck.

The other teacher, sensing his partner was about to throw up, grabbed Billy by the arm and dragged him away.

"You." Mr. Harris managed, gesturing at Steve. "Principal. Now."

Barely registering the command, Steve moved slowly through the dispersing crowd. He kept the earring clasped tight in his hand as he followed Harris down the corridor.

Sat outside the principal's office, staring into nothing, Steve silently came to terms with how screwed he was. It had, until now, been a source of great pride that he had managed to dodge suspension over the years. Given both the magnitude and multitude of his school-

based indiscretions, it had been almost miraculous. Unfortunately, like everything else he had going for him, his clear record was now a memory.

The secretary was trying to get in touch with his parents, having not believed him when he said they were out of town. That they weren't due back for a few more days was a small consolation. While it did provide a brief breathing period before his father killed him, the dread of what was to come was going to weigh on him in the interim. He'd have to get his hands on plenty of booze over the next few days. There was plenty of anxiety that would need numbing.

"Steve?"

He jumped at the sound of his voice, assuming it was a precursor to something terrible.

Cynthia Something stood next to him. Her eyes were still puffy.

"Hi." He said, not sure what else to say.

"Hey." She smiled. "I, I asked for a hall pass...I gotta get back to class in a few minutes..."

Steve nodded slightly, mind racing.

"Some of the kids were saying that you...after Billy..." Cynthia blinked back a tear. "After he said all that stuff. You beat him up."

Steve's mind stopped racing. He raised his eyebrows.

"Huh?" Was the best he could do.

"They were saying that right after I...left...you started wailing on him." She smiled again. "Gave him a real beating."

As happy as he was that Cynthia Something seemed to find catharsis in this fictionalized 'wailing', Steve was ready to admit that it was a gross overstatement of what happened.

"I...didn't..." He shook his head slightly.

"That his blood?" She asked, nodding to his stained fingers.

Unable to deny the truth, he nodded.

"Good." She said, voice stronger than before.

Slightly admiring the girl's resolve, Steve let out half a laugh. Cynthia
Something took a deep breathe.

"It's not true." She told him. "I don't..."

"No one thinks you do." He spared her having to go on. "He was just being an asshole."

"Yeah." She nodded. "Wish I'd known what an asshole he was before I was left hitching a ride from Mickey's Diner in the middle of the night."

Steve felt a pang of guilt.

"Thank you." She said, quietly.

He shook his head slightly, confused.

"For what?"

Cynthia smiled.

"For standing up for me." She blushed slightly. "I owe you one."

Even if the girl hadn't immediately turned and walked away, Steve wouldn't have had a response for her.

Once again, he found himself staring into the pool, sipping a beer left behind from the previous night. The sun had set around him some time ago but he made no attempt to shield himself from the dropping temperature. He just sat by the poolside, mind too preoccupied to consider how cold it was becoming.

He thought back on what he had perceived as genuine acts of compassion the day before and compared them with that morning's

casual act of brutality towards Cynthia. The stream of abuse that had been hurled at the girl was awful. In thinking of it, Steve was forced to recall Nancy's name scrawled across the cinema marquee. Though not his own handiwork, he had been complicit in its execution. He'd watched Tommy spray that garbage up there and done nothing to stop him, so hurt by what he thought he'd seen between her and Jonathan that he ignored the part of himself that knew it was wrong.

Steve had, eventually, made amends for his callousness. Guilt ridden, he'd done what he could to atone. Billy showed no remorse. He'd destroyed that girl without a second's thought, purely because she had been a nuisance. Billy was a bottomless well of anger, violence and cruelty and Steve berated himself for allowing a few seemingly sincere moments, moments that likely meant nothing, to make him think otherwise.

Shortly after he'd ditched Tommy and Carol, Steve had started waking up from dreams he couldn't remember, riddled with a self-loathing that made him sick to his stomach. He'd kept these experiences to himself until one night when, drenched in sweat, he'd sat shaking in the bed while Nancy had tried desperately to understand what had upset him. He'd never been able to explain it. He was unable to remember the dreams, only the overwhelming emptiness he felt afterwards.

Wracked with the usual sense of guilt that accompanied the nightmares, he'd asked Nancy why, after all the awful things he'd done, she had forgiven him.

Thinking back on the moment, Steve pictured Nancy's face, perhaps displaying more solemn an expression than the question should have elicited. He wondered if, by making the query, he had inadvertently triggered in Nancy the realization that she didn't actually love him. It would make sense, his being the maker of his own sorrow.

Regardless of what had gone through her mind at the time, her eventual answer had stayed with him.

"I knew that wasn't you. I knew there was something else."

Rising from the deckchair, Steve headed into the house and chucked

the empty can into the kitchen sink. As he opened the fridge to retrieve what remained of Billy's six-pack, the sudden roar of the Camaro echoed from outside, bringing him to a halt.

"Shit." Steve sighed and let the fridge door close shut.

He arrived out front just as the engine was switched off. Unsure what to expect from the visit, he crossed his arms and stood his ground a medium distance from the car. Billy's voice echoed in his mind, telling him to "plant his feet". He begrudgingly took the advice.

"What the hell are you doing here?" He called out.

Billy stepped out of the car and slammed the door shut behind him. A white bandage covered his earlobe.

"The hell do you think I'm doing here, you little shit?" He flicked his cigarette butt at Steve. "You thought I was gonna let you away with that pussy move you pulled today?"

His eyes weren't as rage-filled as Steve had last seen them, but there was a darkness there.

"You know I heard a filthy little rumour that you beat the shit out of me." Billy raised his eyebrows. "You hear that one, Harrington?"

Steve shrugged.

"No. I heard one that said you went crying to the nurse's office like a little bitch, though, that the same one you're talking about?"

Billy laughed slightly, though it was far from genuine.

"We both know who the bitch is here."

He hoped his face didn't betray the momentary flash of shame that he felt.

"You know, the whole way here, I wasn't sure whether I was gonna give you a chance to apologise or if I was gonna just beat the shit out of you." Billy shrugged. "Still haven't made up my mind. You got a

preference?"

The idea of apologizing, in whatever form Billy had in mind, wasn't entertained for a second.

"Think I'll take my chances with you trying to beat the shit out of me." Steve assured him, keeping his voice steady.

Billy cracked a disingenuous smile and paced around to the front of his car. Resting against the hood, he looked Steve up and down.

"Pretty dumb choice." He licked his lips. "See, either way, this ends with your knees on the ground and your lips around my dick. So, if I decide to let you apologise, it means I sit here while you blow me, maybe I tell you what a good job you're doing and, if I'm generous, I might even let you know before I shoot my wad."

He winked at Steve.

"I get the feeling you're not a swallower."

Steve refused to look away, knowing it would only make it worse. Unfortunately, in keeping with his increasingly poor luck, the pain in his back slowly began to make its return.

"But, if we go the route you want, then we're talking a much rougher night." Billy adjusted himself on the hood. "We're talking me beating every last inch of pretty off that face before I skull fuck what's left of it. And I can promise you, Harrington, the load I make you swallow after that will have you choking."

For a moment, he considered simply turning around, walking back into the house and closing the door. He'd pay for it later, surely. But the pain and exhaustion were enveloping him; he wanted so badly to collapse to the ground.

"So, what's it gonna be?" Billy cocked his head to the side, awaiting an answer.

Steve stared at the boy, sat so confidently on the hood of that God damn car. The dull throbbing in his back reminded him of the manic, unconcerned laughter he'd heard as he fell through the window. The

total disregard for his wellbeing.

"What you did to that girl was messed up." Steve looked Billy dead in the eyes. "You know that, right?"

Billy pushed away from the car.

"What is your fixation on this chick, Harrington?" He frowned. "I don't get this White Knight shtick you're on."

"Christ, you seriously don't feel bad about it? At all?" Steve searched for a sign of remorse. "You ripped her to shreds like she was nothing and you honestly don't care?"

Billy began taking his jacket off.

"I told you she was getting on my nerves." He walked around the side of the Camaro and threw his coat through the open window. "You know, I'm getting sick of your shit. I might just beat the shit out of you now anyway."

"You can't be this much of an asshole." Steve shook his head slightly.

A smile crept across Billy's face.

"Okay." He said, licking his lips. "I know what this is."

Steve's stomach started to tighten again.

"I get it now. You could give a shit about some little bitch." The darkness in Billy's eyes was replaced with a dirty glee. "This is you pretending you still have some self respect left."

Arms still crossed, Steve felt his fists clench.

"This is you thinking that if I was really 'this much of an asshole', you'd be able to say 'no' to me." Billy extended his arms slightly, presenting himself in all his glory. "But you can't."

Steve watched silently as Billy walked towards him. He stopped with a few inches between them.

"That's why you're being such a little bitch. That's why you're trying to convince yourself that I might not be a complete piece of shit. Because you don't want to admit that it doesn't matter how much of an asshole I am, you're still hoping I go into that house, hold you down and make you sorry for what you did today. You're just desperate for an excuse not to hate yourself for it." He threw Steve a toothy smile. "Am I right, pretty boy?"

Whether it was the gradually worsening ache in his back or the acknowledgement of a harsh reality, Steve found himself loosing his resolve. His fists unclenched and his arms sagged slightly. Billy smirked at the sign of defeat.

"I'm right." He surmised.

"Get the hell out of here." Steve said, turning back to the house.

He barely made it two steps before he felt a tug. The grip on his belt loop held him in place as he felt Billy move behind him, pressing himself close.

"You can hate yourself later." The boy said, an inch from his ear. "We still have a score to settle."

Steve shut his eyes and sighed. The pain in his back was begging him to crumple to the ground.

"Please." He hated himself for pleading. "Please leave."

"You know that's not gonna work." Billy rested his hands on Steve's waist, inadvertently providing him with some much-needed support.

The sturdy presence of the body behind him proved too much for Steve's aching back to resist. He felt himself relaxing against Billy, comforted by the relief it delivered. They stood in silence for a moment.

"Not in the best shape, are you, Harrington?" The voice seemed a fraction softer. "Well, you know even if I leave the payback to another night, I didn't drag my ass here for nothing."

A kiss sinking into his neck brought Steve's eyes open. He stared at

the house's open door. It should have been so easy to just go back inside, lock the door behind him. Instead, in a move he couldn't quite justify to himself, he placed his hands over those at his waist, holding them in place.

"House looks pretty empty." Billy moved his lips to Steve's ear. "You all alone again?"

"Yeah." He whispered.

"Hm." Steve was sure he felt the boy start to rub against him. "I'd ask if I can come inside but we both know that's how you like it so..."

Despite every ounce of pain, anger and self-loathing that occupied his mind, Steve cracked an exhausted smile.

"You're a piece of shit, you know that?" He said through a small laugh.

From the corner of his eye, Steve thought he spotted Billy smile.

"I get the feeling that's what does it for you, though."

It hurt again, mostly because he hadn't had time to heal. Billy had made sure to get him ready properly this time, though. He'd spent time making sure he was relaxed enough.

The first time round, it was as he'd expected. Biting, hair pulling. Billy let him come first but he had had to ask permission, "like a bitch". Billy only managed to come by feeding him lines to say. "Your cock is ripping me up." "Fuck my tight ass raw." He had to beg Billy to "tear him open and fill him up". It didn't matter that he was being prompted, hearing him say the words seemed to be enough for Billy. Every thrust and pull and scratch, Billy would keep asking if he liked it. Every "yes" was the truth.

When they went a second time, it was different. Early on, the pain in his back re-surfaced. He had winced and flinched and Billy had stopped immediately. Before he could ask to take a break, he'd felt the boy's warm hand start to run gently up and down his back, easing the pain. Soon, he was ready to keep going. It was slower, though,

easier on him. They lay on their sides, Billy's arm wrapped tight around his chest. There wasn't much talking. When Billy came, unassisted by dirty talk, he'd leaned against him for a moment and kissed the back of his neck. Then, without a word, Billy had turned him on his back and finished him off with his mouth. Afterwards they lay in silence for a while, a big enough space between them that they wouldn't accidentally touch.

The first round was very 'Billy'.

The second round was something else.

5. Chapter 5

A/N: 1) Courtesy warning, this chapter is almost bereft of actual Harringrove interaction but sometimes plot development is a necessary evil. Next chapter though is straight up Steve/Billy fun time. 2) Thank you. I'm having fun. I hope you are too x

He'd woken up alone on Tuesday morning and that was how he'd spent the next few days. It was the usual story: nowhere to go, no one to see. Each day of his suspension was spent wandering the house, venturing out only once for supplies after he'd eaten every bit of junk food in the place.

Each night, he'd lie on the couch, eyes on the TV but keeping an ear out for any noise from outside. Any sign someone might be coming up the driveway. Someone he hadn't invited but who he couldn't turn away. His sleep became sporadic, eventually falling into a cycle of naps more so than full nights. Every time he woke up, he'd wonder if he might have slept through the roar of an engine or a banging on the door. A missed opportunity.

Eventually, he started leaving the front door permanently unlocked.

Each time he felt his eyes start to drop or his head start to loll, his final thought before drifting off would be of waking up to find he wasn't alone. The removal of the locked door as an obstacle gave opportunity for his envisaged caller to come inside, maybe lie next him, maybe wake him with a careful touch. An hour or two into his sleep, however, he would stir awake to find himself company only to whatever shadows watched over him.

There always followed a moment of disappointment so intense that it pained him.

The slam of the front door woke him like a shot. He sprang from the bed, standing shaky and wide-eyed in the centre of his room for several seconds. He didn't quite understand his own violent reaction to the sound, until his mind began to catch up with itself.

Keeping erratic sleeping hours had thrown his internal clock off kilter. No schedule to keep meant he'd lost track of the days. He'd slipped up. His parents were back.

Steve threw a glance to the mirror. He looked like death. His lackadaisical approach to food and sleep had left him paler and more exhausted than ever. Worse still were the bruises and bite marks that coloured his neck, still haunting him from Monday night.

He dug out a turtleneck and prayed he made it downstairs before his father got a good look at the place.

Their suitcases, set at the end of the stairs, were like a warning, an indicator that danger lay beyond that point. He took a deep breathe before he left the last stair, knowing from the sound of crashing plates exactly what he was likely to find in the kitchen.

His mother sat at the table with a distant stare fixed to the floor. His entrance brought her gaze upwards and she seemed almost disappointed to see him. Steve didn't take this badly. He knew it was born of concern. She had clearly been hoping, for his sake, that he'd been out.

"Hey Mom." He took a step towards her, wrapping her shoulders in a one-armed hug.

"Hi honey –" She managed to get one arm around his back before the sound of another plate crashing caused her to jump into retreat.

Steve looked across to the counter and watched as his father shoved dirty dishes aimlessly around the surface. He wasn't attempting the clean his son's mess, only to make as much noise as he could until he had someone to yell at.

"Glad to see you're making the most out your suspension." His dad threw an empty beer can into the sink.

"Oh so you did know about that?" Steve asked, feigning surprise. "I wasn't sure. I figured if you did then you might have at least called or something but it's good to know that you had your priorities straight,

stayed focused on getting drunk at the hotel bar."

His father's stare bore into him. Steve's aunts had often told him that he had his father's eyes. He hated them when they said it.

"Well, your mother and I agreed that we weren't going to let you ruin our trip."

Steve's mom shook her head slightly.

"That's not what – "

"What the hell is wrong with you?" His dad ignored her attempts to calm the situation and remained focused on Steve. "You're a senior, you only have a few months left. You're so close to graduating, you can't try for once not to screw up?"

Steve took a deep breathe.

"It's one week's suspension. They're not gonna keep me back for getting in one fight."

He watched as his father threw another two empties into the sink. The place seemed covered in them. Christ, there were so many. Surely he hadn't drank them all?

"Well it's not as if your grades are good enough for colleges to just overlook that kind of behavior." There was venom in every word.

"Since when do you care if I go to college?" Steve asked, shaking his head. "I thought you wanted me to stay stuck here, working for you? I mean, don't get me wrong, you make it look fun. Go to these conferences every other week, get drunk, forget you have a kid..."

His father flung another can across the room and stormed towards him. A firm and sudden push to the chest sent Steve stumbling backwards into the wall. He saw his mother's eyes shut tight. It worried him.

"Did it ever occur to you, boy, that I might be looking forward to seeing you go to college?" Steve knew better than to think this was meant with kindness. "It'd mean that after eighteen years of fuck ups

I'd finally have a reason to be proud of you."

The elder Harrington was a tall man and rose several inches above his son. Even standing a foot or so away from him, Steve still had to look up to meet his eye.

"Not because you'd worked hard or even done well," He continued. "but because, for once, you'd have managed not to screw up badly enough to be a complete failure."

Steve broke his father's gaze, biting his lip tightly.

"This stage, the only thing you had going for you is basketball. Then when your principal called me, he said you'd been benched." His father stepped forward and pushed his shoulder, pulling his attention back. "That right?"

"Not yet." Steve said quickly. "Coach said if I..."

"Get your act together?" His dad finished for him, scoffing at the idea. "Well, let's see how that goes."

Much to Steve's relief, his mom rose from her seat and took a step towards her husband, placing a hand on his shoulder. It managed to draw the man's attention.

"I'm so tired." She said to him. "Can we go get something to eat tonight? I don't feel like cooking..."

It always amazed Steve how his mother could interrupt these kinds of altercations with the most inane of injections. She'd never tell her husband to stop, never jump to Steve's defense. Only make the most radical of subject changes in the hopes that it would halt the situation. And, somehow, it usually worked.

After a moment's hesitation, Steve's dad took his wife's hand and nodded.

"Sure." He looked back down at his son. "We're going out for dinner. I'm sure you can manage something for yourself."

Steve didn't respond, just gave half a nod and hoped that it would

move them on. Sure enough, at his mother's lead, they began moving towards the kitchen door. Just before he could relax, Steve watched his father turn back and step towards him. His breathe caught in his chest as the man's open palm stopped inches from his face.

"I want this place clean when we get back, you lazy little shit."

Steve nodded vigourously this time but kept his eyes away from his father's. The man lowered his hand and turned away, shaking his head at his cowering son.

A minute after the front door closed, Steve finally stopped shaking. He looked around at the mess of dishes and cans scattered across the kitchen.

"Fuck you." He whispered, walking out of the kitchen and heading straight for the front door.

There was only one person he'd ever spoken to about his dad.

Steve sat outside the Wheeler's house, his BMW parked far enough from the driveway that he could chicken out and drive off if he needed to without drawing any attention. He glanced at himself in the rear view mirror. His eyes were still red but he figured he could blame it on the cold. Same with the slight shake in his hands.

He didn't know what he was going to say. He'd been alone for days and the clash with his dad had been the first interaction he'd had with another person since the day of his suspension. The man's words, while nothing new between the father and son, had left him shaken and now he just needed someone to talk to. He needed a voice that wasn't going to tell him what a waste he was and even spending the night alone with himself couldn't guarantee him that much.

As he walked to the front door, an unexpected voice made him jump.

"Steve?"

He stumbled slightly as he turned around, surprised to see Dustin and Lucas arriving behind him.

"You look like shit." Lucas continued, looking him up and down.

"Hey...guys..." He blinked rapidly, hoping his eyes were clear.

"What are you doing here?" Dustin asked, not quite as standoffish as their last interaction.

Steve looked at the kid and felt his face start to heat up. "You're kind of a big deal to him.". That's what Nancy had said. Dustin had wanted Steve in his life. Dustin had needed him. Dustin had been the closest thing to a friend he had left and he'd screwed it up. Because of course he had.

"I'm sorry." He muttered, barely noticing the words leaving his lips.

The boys clearly misinterpreted this as an indication that he hadn't heard them.

"Steve, what are you doing here?" Lucas repeated.

He knew there was concern on the boys' faces but something in him refused to acknowledge it as such. He shook his head and continued towards the door. They hurried after him, arguing over whether or not he was drunk.

Steve rang the bell, ignoring their nattering.

"He's not gonna try and win Nancy back or something, is he?" Lucas asked. "I can't watch that."

He stared at the door, begging it to open. Of course he wasn't trying to win her back. She didn't love him, he knew that. But she didn't hate him. And he just needed five minutes with someone who didn't hate him.

"Nah, idiot probably wrecked his car again." Dustin looked at Steve. "You need another ride from Jonathan to –"

"Dickhead!" Steve yelled at the kid. "I said I was sorry! Christ, get over it! Tell you what, next time some girls humiliate you in front of the whole school, I promise to be there. Believe me, there'll be plenty more opportunities."

The instant the words left his lips, he felt sick. The look on Dustin's face turned his chest into a bottomless pit.

"Steve!"

His head snapped to the door. He hadn't noticed it open. He wasn't sure how much Nancy had heard but based on the look in her eyes, it had been enough.

He looked back at Dustin, completely shaken by his own actions.

"Jesus, man, I didn't mean – " His mouth had gone suddenly dry.

"Guys, Mike's downstairs." Nancy didn't take her eyes off of Steve. "Go."

Lucas grabbed Dustin's shoulder and started pulling him inside the house.

"Dustin, I didn't mean..." Steve couldn't get his head straight quick enough.

"Screw you." Was all he heard before the kids were out of sight.

He was left standing on the doorstep, looking in at Nancy. After a few seconds of silence, she stepped outside and closed the door over.

"What was that?" She asked, arms crossed to shelter herself from the chill.

Steve shook his head.

"I don't know..." His eyes fell shut. "Shit, I don't..."

"Are you okay?" She asked, tone less harsh than before. "You don't look great."

He opened his eyes. Again, a part of him recognized the look in her eye as concern, just as he had with Dustin and Lucas. And as before, he assured himself he must have been wrong. It wasn't concern. It was pity. He was sure of it. And there was a difference.

"I'm fine, Nance." He sighed, realising the mistake he'd made in coming. "Forget it."

"Do you need to talk?" She asked. "You seem a bit –"

"I said I'm fine." He said coldly.

Nancy was unaffected by his harshness.

"Steve," She sounded like she was trying to get something through to him. "you beat up Billy Hargrove –"

"I didn't beat him up, Christ." He snapped. "Everyone keeps saying I beat him up...."

"And Jonathan said you left in kind of a hurry on Sunday," Nancy tried to move past his interruption. "kind of out of nowhere –"

"Right, Jonathan, there it is." He ignored the voice in his head begging him to stop talking. "Wondered how long it would take for you to mention him."

"Hey." She became more defensive. "Look, I don't know what's wrong but...I'm here. Offering to listen. Offering you my help –"

"Yeah, well, you can keep it." Steve shrugged. "And you can keep the pity and the bullshit doe eyed look pretending you give a crap. I don't need it."

Nancy looked ready to clock him. He wished she would.

"Then what are you doing here?" She asked, unblinking.

He shook his head and shrugged.

"I have no idea."

He turned on his heel and marched back towards the car, praying that he'd hear the front door shut before he started crying again.

Steve was painfully aware of how creepy and pathetic sitting in a

parked car outside his ex-girlfriend's house was. His decision to park so far from the actual driveway proved advantageous in that he could plant himself there and not cause, admittedly understandable, alarm. It wasn't about Nancy though. He wasn't playing the creepy stalker. Sitting in his car just seemed preferable to going home. There, he'd just be waiting for his parents to come back. Here, he could pretend they never were. He didn't want to move. He just wanted to stay slumped in the driver's seat, staring at nothing and pretending that that was all there was to life.

He turned slightly, resting his head against the window and feeling his eyes begin to drop. Like so many times over the previous few days, his mind instinctively flickered to the thought of waking up to find he wasn't alone. It lasted a fraction of a second but he pictured stirring awake to see a body in the passenger seat, blonde hair pressed against the headrest, a cigarette propped between two lips.

Unlike before, however, he didn't actually manage to fall asleep. Instead, moments from drifting off, he was pushed forward in his seat by the oncoming blare of hard rock ripping through the night. He was shocked to see the Camaro come belting down the road towards him, screeching to a halt outside the Wheeler's house.

"Shit." He spat, slinking down in the seat, hoping not to be seen.

From his obscured view, he could just about make out Max jumping from the car, backpack flung over one shoulder. She said nothing to her chauffeur before shutting the door and heading towards the house. Steve, better judgement continuously being ignored, rose in his seat slightly to glance across at the other car. He was far enough away that he was almost sure he wouldn't be spotted. Unfortunately, Billy seemed to be an expert at honing in on him.

The moment his eyes raised above the dashboard, they met those of the other boy. Billy seemed unmoved at the sight of him, not confused or surprised. His face remained calm. Unable to pull away from the stare, Steve allowed himself to sit up and face him head on.

He was half aware of movement in the corner of his eye. The Wheeler's door opening again, accepting Max inside. He and Billy held each other's gaze until the front door shut, at which point a rush

of adrenaline forced Steve out of the Beemer and over to the other car.

The driver's side window was already rolled down by the time he reached it.

"If you let that battery run down again, Harrington, I swear –"

"What happened to your face?" Steve interjected, eyeing the dark bruising that crept from the boy's eye down to his cheek

Billy looked uncomfortable for the briefest of moments before shrugging it off.

"s nothing." He observed Steve's own appearance. "You don't exactly look like hot shit yourself."

Steve was getting sick of hearing about how shitty he looked.

"Yeah, so everyone keeps telling me." He muttered, glancing up and down the empty street.

Billy's engine was still running and the boy seemed to be getting impatient.

"There something you want?" He asked. "Cause I'm not –"

"You doing anything tonight?" Steve asked, turning back to the car.

Billy cracked a smile.

"I don't know." He said, raising his eyebrows. "It's Friday night. Plenty of offers."

"Do you wanna do something?" Steve stared in at him, willing him to give the right answer.

Billy looked away and let out a low whistle.

"You're pathetic, you know that?"

Steve nodded.

"Yeah, I know." He replied sincerely.

The response seemed to surprise Billy. He turned and gave Steve a long stare, during which Steve began to feel more and more exposed. Eventually, the boy's expression slipped to indifference.

"Listen, I got shit to do – "

"Please." Steve said quickly, finding he didn't care how it sounded.

For an instant, Steve saw a smile flick at the corner of the boy's mouth. He seemed to fight hard to cover it.

"I got shit to do..." Billy repeated, allowing his lips to curve upwards.
"...so we gotta take a detour first."

Much to his surprise, Steve suddenly felt a wave of relief wash over him. He smiled for the first time in days.

"You do that on purpose?" He asked of the choice of words.

Billy turned his gaze back the road.

"Get in if you're getting in, pretty boy."

6. Chapter 6

At another time, the music blasting from the Camaro's cassette player would have annoyed the shit out of Steve after a while. For him, screeching guitars and heavy drums got repetitive pretty quick. In his current frame of mind, however, they were somewhat of a relief. The music was a reprieve from the thoughts cluttering his head. He knew that, soon, he wouldn't have to worry about them anymore. Billy would make the voices go away, the way he had before. Steve would get his release. Until then, he'd settle with the tinnitus-inducing plan B and allow the music to drown everything out.

For the most part, he kept his eyes on the scenery running past the windows, only occasionally casting a glance in Billy's direction. As far as he could tell, Billy's eyes remained on the road. Another virtue of the car's built-in soundtrack was that it removed the need to fill awkward silences. They hadn't said a word to each other since they'd pulled away from the Wheeler's house and, without the music, Steve was sure that he'd find himself anxiously filling the void with potentially disastrous conversation. He was certain that anything he said would likely lead to mockery or even ejection from the car. Instead, he kept his mouth shut and let the music save him the pain.

"So we really gonna ignore you camping out in front of your ex's house?"

The question came from nowhere, several minutes into the journey.

"I wasn't..." Steve shuffled in his seat. "I dropped by and –"

"You looked like you were about to fall asleep." Billy pulled a hand from the steering wheel and started rooting in his pockets. "She know you sit out there at night?"

Steve rolled his eyes.

"I had to talk to her about something, alright? I just left the house when you pulled up."

In truth, he'd been sitting in the car for a while. How long exactly, he

wasn't sure. Long enough to cry until his eyes started scratching.

"Bullshit." Billy found his cigarettes and slipped one between his lips, before shaking the pack at Steve. "You still a quitter?"

Steve eyed the pack. Through some magic of the nervous system, he couldn't separate the sight of the cigarettes from the sensation of holding one between his fingers as Billy deep-throated his cock in the living room. He slid one from the package with little hesitation.

"Atta boy." Billy smiled, pocketing the pack. "Do the honours."

Steve popped the car's cigarette lighter and waited as it heated. He threw a glance at his driver and the unlit cigarette between his lips. Steve was aware that, despite every part of him that Billy's lips had touched, the two boys hadn't actually kissed. He didn't know if this was coincidence or a conscious effort on Billy's part. Maybe even a sub-conscious one on his own part.

The last time he'd seen Billy, Steve had been lying in bed, physically exhausted but wide-awake. He'd watched as the boy slinked out of bed and silently began dressing, searching Steve's room for various discarded items of clothing. Steve had made no move to help him, nor had he made a sound. He had simply lain on his side, silent and still, watching Billy move. As he'd done so, he'd thought about the arm wrapped around his chest, holding him close to Billy's own. He'd thought about the face pressed into the back of his neck, breathing him in with every thrust. More than anything, he'd recalled absent-mindedly reaching for the hand that held onto his hip and linking his fingers with the ones he found there.

It had been different and he knew it.

Finally, when a fully dressed Billy had seemed about to face him, Steve had let his eyes fall shut. He'd waited until he heard the door close before opening them again.

Steve knew why he'd pretended to be asleep. He knew why the idea of speaking to Billy after a wholly more intimate experience like that was impossible for him to face. And he was sure that it was the same reason why they hadn't kissed.

"Jesus Christ, you're useless." Billy grumbled, pulling out the heated lighter and pressing it to the end of his cigarette. "One job, Harrington."

Steve shook himself from his thoughts.

"Sorry." He muttered, popping his own cigarette between his lips.

Billy held the little cylinder towards him, gesturing him to lean in. Steve carefully lowered his mouth towards the piping hot metal and let the chemical-drenched tobacco ignite.

For a minute or so, the only voice in the car was screaming from the speakers.

"So what do you do when you're sitting out there?" Billy asked suddenly, ignoring a stop sign at break neck speed. "You know, parked outside her house?"

Steve knocked back against the headrest in frustration.

"Christ, I don't –"

"I bet I can tell you." Billy smiled.

Steve took a long drag and looked out the window.

"Where are we going?" He asked, partially out of desperation for a topic change.

"Liquor store." Billy said, flicking ash out of his window "What do you bet I know what you do out there?"

"That's it? You need to buy booze?" Steve raised his eyebrows. "That's the shit you have to do?"

"I bet you twenty bucks I know what you do when you sit outside her house." He blew a puff of smoke at Steve. "Twenty bucks."

Steve let out an exasperated moan.

"Alright, fine, what do I do?" He gave in, admittedly curious as to

what Billy was going to come up with.

Billy tapped the steering wheel with his cigarette filter.

"Not that hard to figure out." He said, matter-of-factly. "See, you might be my bitch now, but from what I hear, you were hers long before that."

Steve felt his mouth twitch at the remark, forcing back an involuntary snarl.

"Am I wrong?" Billy asked, laughing slightly. "You dropped everything for that girl, right?"

"It's called love, asshole." Steve knew that defense wasn't helping his case.

"Sure it is." Billy smiled as he overtook another car. "Then she fucks you over and you're left all alone, no idea what to do with yourself. You got no friends, you got no pull at school anymore. So you do what any dog does. Sit outside your owner's door, howling, begging to be let back in the house. Only with you, you're parked outside her place, crying your eyes out instead."

The Camaro took a sharp turn with no deceleration. Steve barely had time to brace himself in his seat.

"It's not even about her, though." Billy continued, quieter than before. "You're all worked up but it's not about her. You're crying because you think you need fixing and you can't figure out if she's what broke you or if you were already a little bit damaged to start with."

Billy's cigarette remained neglected between his fingers, slowly accumulating a mash of ash.

"It's fucked up." He said, smile long gone. "When someone tells you you're pathetic and you agree with them."

Steve tried to blink away the sting that was sneaking into his eyes. He knew he didn't sit outside of Nancy's house every night, crying. He was sure Billy knew it too. But the message that sat at the centre of this little construct was set firmly in reality, more so than Steve felt

comfortable acknowledging.

"It kinda takes the fun out of it." Billy said, flicking the built-up ash from his cigarette.

For the first time in while, the boy turned to look at his passenger. The gaze was too sincere for Steve to handle. He could only hold it for a moment before he felt compelled to look away.

"So that's what you think I do?" He asked, trying to mask how shaken he was. "Sit out front and cry?"

Billy took a drag and shook his head.

"Nah." He said, voice rising back above the din of the stereo. "I think you sit out front, cry and jerk off."

Steve rolled his eyes.

"Of course you do." He sighed, quietly relieved that Billy was steering away from the psychoanalysis and back into his typical wheelhouse.

"I do." Billy shifted back to a more jovial tone of voice, as if nothing he'd said had been out loud. "Shit gets too much for you to handle and there's only one thing for it. So you sit there, you cry, you tug one out and then – "

"And then what?" Steve snapped. "What else do I do?"

The smile crept back across Billy's face.

"Well I'll tell you but you gotta show me."

Steve blew smoke out his window and frowned.

"What?"

Billy turned his attention to Steve, eyes completely off the road.

"I tell you what you do in that car, you do it for me here."

Steve's stomach started tightening up. It wasn't what he'd had in mind but the look in those eyes made it a hard offer to decline.

"Okay." He said quietly. "So what do I do?"

Billy turned back to the road and flicked the remainder of his cigarette out the window.

"You start off feeling yourself up through your jeans, rubbing yourself like it's some chick's clit." He threw a playfully disparaging look at Steve. "Cause you love teasing yourself."

After slowly disposing of his cigarette through the window, Steve reached down and started rubbing himself. He wasn't sure if his quickening pulse was down to the friction or the company.

"Like this?" He asked, pushing himself into his palm.

"Exactly like that." Billy nodded, barely looking his way. "And you're so fucking easy, it doesn't take long til you start chubbing up. And those snug little jeans start getting way too tight."

As if on queue, Steve felt himself swelling against the seam of his zipper, filling up what small amount of give there was in his jeans. Despite the pressure, he continued rubbing. The pleasantly rough resistance offset any discomfort.

"You keep going though, cause you think as long as it's over the clothes, it's not that bad." Billy's eyes fell on Steve's crotch for a moment. "As if touching yourself outside some girl's house isn't the creepiest thing you can do, even if you are keeping your junk under wraps."

The boy's gaze returned to the road. Steve saw his grip on the steering wheel tightening.

"You know how fucked up it is, don't you?" He asked, chewing his lip.

Steve pushed his hand harder against himself.

"Yeah." He nodded.

"You know how fucked up you are?" Billy smirked.

Steve winced at the increased pressure he found himself applying.

"Yeah." He nodded again. "I know."

A delighted grunt slipped past Billy's lips.

"So, right when you start to think you're gonna come all over those designer jeans, that's when you give yourself a break." He smiled. "Finally pull yourself out and start going skin to skin."

Steve quickly reached for his zipper but paused when they slowed at a red light, suddenly aware of the couple passing by in front of the car. He imagined the horror of anyone glancing into the car and seeing him with his dick in his hand.

"Don't worry about them." Billy said, reading his mind. "They're not gonna see something they think they shouldn't."

Steve was slowly realising that Billy had an unexpected knack for insightful observations. With a deep breathe, he pushed his jeans down past his ass and pulled his dick out of his underwear. The other boy threw a look downwards and licked his lips.

"You need me to tell you how to jerk off?" He laughed, turning onto a slightly busier street.

The sudden influx of potential spectators sent Steve's heart racing. The fear, however, forced his hand to start moving. One hand gripped tightly on his seat and the other ran frantically up and down his cock as if he needed to come before anyone saw him.

"You're gonna rub yourself raw, pretty boy." Billy remarked, reaching across to Steve's wrist. "Here."

His hand was pulled from its work and yanked towards the steering wheel. Billy ran his tongue across Steve's palm, making sure to leave it nicely saturated before pushing it back towards him.

"Enjoy it." He said, wiping his mouth.

Steve slipped his wet hand back around his cock and continued stroking. This time, however, he gave less thought to the Hawkins residents passing by the car's windows. Instead, he focused on the warm saliva being spread over his dick, and the mouth that it came

from. Soon, he all but forgot about the danger of being spotted. He felt like he and Billy were isolated within the car, invisible and inaccessible.

"Feels good, doesn't it?" Billy asked, not even looking at him.

"Yeah." The corner of Steve's mouth ticked upwards.

"Bet you're thinking about something really good right now." Billy threw a glance at the smile on his face.

"Your mouth." He said, before he could think to stop himself.

Billy let out genuine laughter.

"You know what you do after, right?" Billy smiled. "You know what you do when you're sitting there in the dark, right after you come all over yourself like a desperate little bitch?"

Steve felt a twinge run through him at the mention of that last word. He turned his head and looked at Billy.

"What?" He breathed, increasing his speed.

By this time, they were nearing the liquor store and Steve was beginning to leak over his hand.

"You take one of those creamy wet fingers," Billy adjusted himself in the driver's seat, eyes still square on the road. "and you twist around and you start fingering yourself."

Steve felt a surge and knew he was getting close.

"You're sitting there, all alone." Billy continued, smile flicking up at the thought of it. "You push in and out, trying to reach that sweet spot."

His tongue flashed out over his lips. The look in the boy's eyes was so distant that Steve wondered for a second if he was even seeing the road.

"And you're wishing it was me doing it." He said, almost to himself

more than to Steve. "You're wishing it was me inside you, stretching you out."

Steve groaned as he began to erupt over his hand. The sound pulled Billy's focus. He seemed engrossed by the image. After a moment, he looked up and caught Steve's eye. They stared at each other for several seconds before Billy quickly turned back to the windshield, just managing to pull into the liquor store car park a second before they passed it. He switched the ignition off and settled back into the seat.

It was only the sudden absence of music that made Steve realise that it had been playing the whole time. Had he been asked, he would've said Billy's voice was the only sound he'd heard in the last ten minutes.

Unsure how else to proceed, Steve touched the white mess that clung to the hem of his sweater and collected a string of cum, ready to enact the next step of their fictitious re-enactment. Quick as a flash, Billy reached across and stopped him moving any further.

"You don't need to do that." He assured him with a smile.

He leaned forward and sucked the cum from Steve's finger.

"You got me for that part now, pretty boy." Billy said, throwing Steve's hand back at him.

It might have been the endorphins, the adrenaline or simply the look in the boy's eyes, but Steve thought that he was ready to kiss Billy at that moment.

Billy sat back in his seat and stretched his hand out.

"Twenty bucks." He demanded, without a glance in Steve's direction.

The abrupt shift in tone was too much for Steve not to burst into laughter.

"Are you kidding me?" He managed as he calmed himself.

Billy's eyes drifted towards him.

"You backing out on a bet, Harrington?"

"Come on, you know that wasn't..."

The look in Billy's eyes told Steve that arguing was futile.

"Look, you can give me twenty bucks or I can rent your mouth out at two bucks a pop to the next group of guys I see." Billy cocked an eyebrow. "Your choice."

Though almost positive that it was an empty threat, Steve begrudgingly fished out any cash he had in his pockets and stuffed it into Billy's hand. Without an utterance of thanks, the boy took the money and exited the vehicle, leaving Steve to wait as he headed towards the liquor store.

Left to the quiet, Steve found a rag to clean himself with and then lay back in his seat, eyes shut and muscles loose. To his relief, the voices remained as silent as his surroundings.

"You're an asshole." Steve called through the window as Billy reached down to open the car door.

The smile he received told Steve that Billy practically relished the fact.

"You say that like it's news." He said, sliding into the front seat.

"I want change." Steve insisted, instinctively taking the six-pack from Billy's arms so he could settle into the car.

The driver's door slammed shut.

"I earned that twenty." Billy told him, pulling his cigarettes out again.

"Hell you did." Steve gave a small shake of the head to Billy's offer of another smoke.

Billy lit up and took a deep inhale before firing up the engine again. Music immediately began blaring from the cassette player.

"Not my fault you come so easy." He muttered.

"Fuck you." Steve said with hardly any bite.

"Not a chance, pretty boy." Billy exhaled smoke through a smile. "Not while you got that nice little ass begging to be filled up."

He quickly slipped a hand across the car and under Steve, taking a large grab at whatever flesh he could latch onto. Much to Steve's embarrassment, his first reaction was to jump. Only after that did he rip Billy's hand away and throw it back at him.

"Fuck off." He said, face reddening at the boy's laughter.

"Alright, Harrington, enough bullshit." Billy began backing out of the parking lot. "Let's go. I wanna fuck you in your parents bed this time..."

Steve's hand shot out and gripped the steering wheel, prompting Billy to stop suddenly.

"We can't go to my place." Steve said, eyes not quite meeting Billy's.

He expected an aggressive reaction to the sudden commandeering of the car. To Steve's surprise, however, Billy only nodded slightly and gently elbowed his arm away from the wheel.

"Got it." He said, tone implying that he understood all that Steve wasn't saying on the matter. "Well, you got any other ideas?"

Steve settled back in his seat and shrugged.

"I'm guessing your place isn't – "

"No." Billy cut him off. "It isn't."

Steve had been trying not to focus on the damage that had been done to Billy's face. The quick dismissal of his own home as a viable option for them made Steve wonder again how he had received the heavy bruising.

"So what then?" He asked, praying he wouldn't be forced to go back

home.

Steve knew that the minute that their little adventure ended, he would be faced with the consequences of his actions. Contemplating the repercussions of his disobeying his father was bad enough. Even worse was the thought of the aftermath of his run-ins with Dustin and Nancy. He felt sick at the thought.

He needed to keep it all away for as long as he could. He needed Billy to keep it away.

Billy knocked his thumb against the steering wheel as he thought. Eventually, he turned to Steve. The two sat in silence for a moment, as Billy seemed to consider Steve's pale, exhausted complexion.

"You getting enough sleep, Harrington?" He asked with something close to concern.

Steve shrugged.

"I'm fine." He lied.

Billy returned his focus to reversing out onto the road.

"This'll take a while." He said, speech slightly muffled by the cigarette clinging to his lips. "Grab some sleep."

Billy seemed to be looking everywhere except at his passenger. Steve was sure that, were he to catch Billy's eye, he'd recognise the look he'd find there. He also knew, though, that Billy only shared that look of sincerity when he chose to. Looking for it was as futile as arguing over their twenty-dollar bet.

With some hesitation, Steve propped his head against the window as the car swung back out onto the road and began roaring down the street.

"Thanks, man." He muttered. "You sure you're okay on your own –"

"Jesus, yes." Billy snapped, rolling his eyes. "Get some damn sleep, you look like shit. Nobody's gonna wanna fuck you looking like that."

Steve stifled a laugh as he closed his eyes. It took only seconds for sleep to begin to envelop him. A moment before he drifted off completely, he heard the cassette player being clicked into silence.